

Chapter 1

Background

On May 3, 1988 Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci chartered the Commission on Base Realignment and Closure to recommend military bases within the United States, its commonwealths, territories, and possessions for realignment and closure (see Appendix A). Legislation subsequently passed by the Congress and signed by the President on October 24, 1988 endorsed this approach and provided relief from certain statutory provisions considered impediments to the completion of base closures. The legislation ("Defense Authorization Amendments and Base Closure and Realignment Act"; see Appendix B) constitutes agreement between the Legislative and the Executive Branches that improvement in the military basing structure could be a means of realizing savings in the defense budget, while not impairing the ability of the armed forces to carry out their missions.

Recommendations for military base realignments and closures normally fall within the purview of the Executive Branch, operating under general policy guidance and oversight by the Congress. Nevertheless, a ten-year stalemate over base closures has led the two branches to agree that a commission be established to develop those recommendations.

The chartering of the Commission takes into account the recent history of failed attempts to realign or close bases as well as successful closure actions taken in prior years. A brief review of the base realignment and closure issue is instructive.

In the early 1960s, under the direction of President Kennedy, Secretary of Defense McNamara developed and subsequently implemented the most extensive base realignment and closure program in the history of the United States. Hundreds of base closures and realignments took place during this period, and more than 60 major bases were closed. Criteria governing bases selected for closure were established primarily within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, with minimal consultation with the Military Services or the Congress.

The Congress had not anticipated the broad extent of these actions, and their cumulative political impact was substantial. With very few exceptions, the closure actions were viewed negatively by the Congress, especially since the announcement of base closures was made immediately after the 1964 elections, while the Congress was in recess.

In its next session, the Congress passed legislation setting up reporting requirements designed to involve itself in any DoD base-closure program. The proposal was vetoed by President Johnson. The confrontation between the two branches of government continued to grow. Despite this situation, the Department of Defense was able to complete base realignments and closures routinely throughout the 1960s.

During the early 1970s, the Department found it increasingly difficult to realign or close installations due to repeated attempts

by the Congress to regulate the base-closing process and to limit or deny base-closing funding. In 1976, the Military Construction Authorization Bill contained a provision prohibiting any base closure or reduction of more than 250 civilian employees until the Department had notified Congress of the proposed actions, assessed the personnel and economic impacts, followed the study provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, and waited nine months. This bill was vetoed by President Ford and the Congressional veto override effort failed.

Subsequently, however, President Carter approved legislation requiring the Department to notify Congress that a base is a candidate for reduction or closure; prepare local economic, environmental, and strategic consequence reports; and wait 60 days for Congress' response. This legislation, which also required Congressional approval for any closure affecting 300 or more civilian employees of the Department, effectively brought base closures to a halt.

Since passage of this legislation over a decade ago, there has not been a single major base closure. All attempts at closing major installations have met with failure, and even proposed movements of small military units have been frustrated. Since then, force structure changes and the assignment of new missions to marginal installations, supported by large capital expenditures, have reduced many opportunities for future closures.

Given that situation, the incumbent administration has discussed with the Congress but not pursued the development of a comprehensive proposal recommending base closures to Congress. The President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control (The Grace Commission)

included in its 1983 report a finding that economies could be made in the base structure and recommended that a non-partisan, independent commission be established to study the base-closure issue in a less constrained process and submit a list of closures.

In sum, the current stalemate between the Legislative and the Executive Branches has made it virtually impossible to close any military installation and realize the resultant savings in the defense budget. In addition to straining relations between two branches of government, this stalemate has increased the cost of national defense. These increases, which are not always measurable, flow from inefficiencies such as the requirement for units to travel hundreds of miles to adequate training areas, the necessity for extensive command-and-control systems to ensure coordination of split functions, and the need for senior management to spend time dealing with administrative problems created by an inefficient base structure--time that would be more properly devoted to mission-related activities. In some cases, the Department has been obligated not only to keep certain marginal installations active, with all the attendant operating costs, but also to use severely limited military construction funds either to bring facilities up to standard or to enable the installations to be more fully utilized.

The importance of an efficient military base structure cannot be overstated. The base structure can remain efficient only if the difficult decisions to close and realign bases can be made on a timely basis. The Commission has made a number of such decisions. In addition to achieving documented savings, the Commission's recommendations will alleviate some of the problems discussed above, leading to improved mission effectiveness.